

General Information

The Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) authorized a feasibility study in February 2022 to evaluate a regional water and wastewater system for Levy County, specifically focusing on Cedar Key, Bronson, and Otter Creek.

Study Objectives and Scope

The primary goal of the study is to assess the potential for a regional utility solution to address individual system concerns in these municipalities.

- **Regional Approach:** Evaluation of existing wastewater facilities and future growth needs to examine the feasibility of a joint regional project.
- **Alternative Water Supply (AWS):** Identifying opportunities for reuse and alternative water sources to reduce groundwater pumping and protect the Floridan Aquifer.
- **Environmental Goals:** Supporting coastal resilience by reducing the number of septic tanks and maximizing water reuse in the **Lower Waccasassa Basin**.
- **Funding:** The study was funded by a grant from the **Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)** for Alternative Water Supply Feasibility Studies.

Project Outcomes and Current Status

Since the initial feasibility study, the project has transitioned into further planning and funding stages:

- **W3C Regional System:** As of May 2024, the **Waccasassa Water and Wastewater Cooperative (W3C)** has proposed a **\$120 million** regional potable water and wastewater project.
- **Implementation:** Current efforts include specific sub-projects such as the **Bronson Septic Tank Phase Out Project**, which aims to convert 270 septic systems to central sewer to reduce nitrogen loads.
- **Collaboration:** The initiative is a collaborative effort between Levy County, the affected municipalities, and the SRWMD.

The **Waccasassa Water and Wastewater Cooperative (W3C)** project, which grew out of the initial Suwannee River Water Management District (SRWMD) feasibility study, is currently in the planning and design phase. As of late 2025 and early 2026, the project has secured initial state funding to move toward construction.

Current Funding Status

The project is estimated to cost between **\$120 million and \$138 million**.

- **Grants Secured:** Over \$900,000 has been awarded to date by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), Florida Department of Commerce, and SRWMD for pre-planning and testing.
- **Forgivable Loans:** FDEP has committed loans with high principal forgiveness—up to 50% for water and 80% for wastewater—to support the regional system.
- **Legislative Requests:** For the 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 fiscal years, funding requests include \$1.5 million for land acquisition to relocate Cedar Key's drinking water facilities and \$1.7 million to begin engineering and design of the new mainland treatment plant.

Engineering and Operational Plans

The "W3C" regional system aims to create a "hub-and-spoke" utility model to replace aging, vulnerable infrastructure.

- **Phased Infrastructure:**
 - **Phase I:** Targets a capacity of 500,000 gallons of water and 400,000 gallons of wastewater treatment per day.
 - **Pipeline Network:** A regional pipeline will transport groundwater from the Bronson area to Otter Creek and Cedar Key, with reclaimed sewage effluent pumped back to Bronson for treatment and aquifer recharge.
- **Relocation:** A critical engineering goal is moving Cedar Key's treatment facilities off the island to the mainland to mitigate risks from storm surges and saltwater intrusion.
- **Shared Capacity:** The current allocation for Phase I is divided among members: Bronson (51%), Cedar Key (45%), and Otter Creek (4%).
- **Septic-to-Sewer:** Plans include the Bronson Septic Tank Phase Out, targeting the conversion of 270 septic systems to central sewer to protect the Lower Waccasassa Basin.

Timeline

- **Construction Start:** Most major sub-projects are aiming for construction activity between **2025 and 2027**, following the completion of design and permitting.
- **Projected Completion:** The goal for full operational status of the regional pipeline is **2030**

Source: Suwanee River Water Management District & Waccasassa Water and Wastewater Cooperative (W3C) Facilities Plan